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RUSSELLVILLE

County Commission approves new policy to pursue delinquent solid waste accounts

*John Pilati
Franklin Free Press*

The Franklin County Commission approved a policy giving the Franklin County Solid Waste Department authority to act against customers who fail to pay their garbage pickup fees and are at least five months in arrears.

Commissioners approved the new delinquent account policy at their December 15th business meeting.

In order for the policy to trigger against a Solid Waste customer, that account holder must have failed or refused to pay monthly solid waste/sanitation bills for at least five

months from their due date.

Once the five month arrearage is reached, the customer will have 30 days to make payment in full on the delinquent account. If the customer fails to pay all past due amounts, the account is deemed 'in default' pursuant to the new policy.

Remedies available for customers in default include repossession of the customer's garbage cart and an automatic \$75 per garbage cart service/reset fee being added to the account.

At the expiration of the time set forth in the 30 day delinquency notice, if payment in full has not been made, the account shall be deemed a

See 'COMMISSION,' Page 4

RHS Career Tech students tour CertainTeed manufacturing plant as part of company's workforce development initiative

*Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press*

On the morning of December 10, 13 Russellville High School students were the first locally to take part in a manufacturing workforce development program at the Saint-Gobain CertainTeed Roofing plant located off Walnut Gate Road in Russellville.

The workforce development initiative, called Sustaining Futures, Raising Communities (SFRC), was launched by Saint-Gobain North America to give students "a chance to explore immersive manufacturing environments with a focus on plant jobs that do not require an advanced degree, helping them connect what they learn in school to what's possi-



RHS students observe one step in the manufacturing process as its explained by CertainTeed production lead Zach Broadfoot. (Courtesy: CertainTeed)

ble in the workplace," according to the Saint-Gobain North America

See 'CAREER TECH' Page 5

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Christina Pacheco Butler, age 74, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Sunday, December 7, 2025, at Lakeland Community Hospital in Haleyville. Spry Memorial assisted the family.

Martha Sue "Susie" Marsh, age 91, passed away peacefully at her home in Russellville on Sunday, December 07, 2025, surrounded by her family. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Mary Alice Granier Knoblock, 73, of Red Bay passed away on December 11, 2025 surrounded by her family. Deaton Funeral Home assisted the family.

Lois Kathleen Harrison, 86, of Red Bay passed away Tuesday, December 9, 2025 at her residence. In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions be made to Deaton Funeral Home.

Bobby Jr. Gravitt, age 52 passed away on December 6, 2025. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted with preparations.

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Back to the Bible by Larsen Plyler:

Matthew 9:35-10:4

Jesus continued to teach and heal. The crowds flocked to Him. When He saw them, He was moved to compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Here Jesus makes a connection to Ezekiel 34. There God condemned the leaders of Israel because they took advantage of the people. But, He promised that He would come as the Shepherd. He would, in a new King David (pointing toward Jesus) shepherd His people. Jesus looked at the crowds in His day and saw that they were still being treated like the people of Ezekiel's day. They had been harassed by their leadership and were helpless. But, Jesus arrived to be the Shepherd (fulfilling the promise of God and a new King David because He was God with us).

He told his disciples that the harvest was plentiful, but there were few laborers to do the work. So, they needed to pray for laborers.

Then, Jesus called 12 of his disciples and gave them authority over demons, diseases, and afflictions. Matthew then lists the name of the 12 disciples who would be the apostles. The word apostle means "one sent" and they would be Jesus' official representatives in His work and His teaching.

Lessons to Learn:

See Jesus' concern for the people. He knew how the leaders were treating them. He knew that they lacked the guidance they so desperately needed. Later He will describe Himself as the Good Shepherd because He was going to lay down His life for the sheep (see John 10).

Consider the work that can be done. Jesus saw the crowds that needed help. There are plenty of people still who need the gospel that Jesus was proclaiming. We need to embrace Jesus' teaching and then be ready to share the message with others. We also need to be praying for the Lord's work all over the globe so that the Lord will have laborers to bring in the harvest wherever it may be.

See the role of the apostles. This will be a note that we will come back to throughout the book of Matthew. We might think of the apostles as ambassadors. Jesus entrusted them with the authority that He had over demons, diseases, and afflictions. They were going to be "sent out" (v. 5) to proclaim the same message of Jesus. People's response to them indicated where they stood in relation to the Lord (see Matt. 10:14-15). In order to know about Jesus and His will we depend on the apostles. For example, Matthew, who wrote the gospel account we're studying, was an apostle. Also, consider Matthew 28:18-20, the last verses of this gospel account to see what the apostles were commissioned to do.

Tune in to 100.7 WGOL Sunday at 8:30am for our Back to the Bible Radio Program.

Reach out with your questions, comments, or requests for personal Bible study at backtothebiblepodcast.com or at info@backtothebiblepodcast.com



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'Refusal to Pay,' and shall be turned over to the Franklin County Solid Waste Department's collection attorney, and the Franklin County Health Department shall be notified.

Alabama law requires mandatory participation in a solid waste collection service provided by the customer's local county unless an exemption or exception has been granted. This mandatory participation obligation is described in the Code of Alabama Section 22-27-1.

Additionally, the new policy includes a provision requiring a customer deemed 'in default' to make payment in full for six months of service in advance, as well as satisfying all arrearage amounts owed.

The policy follows months of back and forth discussions between the Franklin County Commission, Solid Waste Manager Gene Ward and Franklin County Attorney Evan Hargett.

The new policy begins in January 2026. All new customers subscribing to the Franklin County Solid Waste Department for solid waste collection/removal shall be given a copy of the new policy at their request.

In other agenda items at the December 15th meeting, commissioners:

—authorizing an invitation to bid for mobile breath alcohol testing devices that will be paid for by Highway Safety grants at no cost to the county.

—authorized Probate Judge Barry Moore to sign an agreement with the Association of County Commissions of Alabama for the county's liability self-insurance fund coverage available through the ACCA.

—tabled any action regarding a proposed Annual Leave Payout Policy in order to obtain feedback from county employees as to how they would feel about a policy that would give them the option of taking an annual payout in lieu of taking annual leave.

—tabled action on proposed roof repairs on the Franklin County Commission Annex building.

—approved the resignation of Colby Haney from Custodian/Housekeeper/Groundskeeper.

—approved the repair of the Belgreen weather siren.

—vacated the public right-of-way on Husey Hammock Road for a distance of 3,200 feet from the intersection of the centerline of Husey Hammock Road and Massey Road to the end of the dead end.

—held a public hearing to receive input on the proposed vacating of Husey Hammock Road. There was no public input either for or against the proposed vacating.

—approved the retirement of Certified Real Property Appraiser Lori Pencil and authorized advertisement for a Non-Certified Real Property Appraiser.

—approved hiring Chris Pierce as a Permanent Corrections Officer/Dispatcher in the Franklin County Sheriff's Office and tabled action on hiring a second Corrections Officer/Dispat Cher.

—rejected the two bids received for the purchase and installation of cameras at the Franklin County Jail as the specs submitted did not match the invitation to bid. The commission will rebid the project with additional details.

—approved the hiring of two Part-Time Courthouse Security Officers, Robert Hicks and Charles Michael.

—approved the purchase of a non-CDL garbage truck for the Solid Waste Department. Financing for the difference between the purchase price of the truck on the state bid website and the insurance settlement will be bid out for the lowest available interest rate.

—approved the resignation of Arlon Glasgow from the Franklin County Water Service Authority Board and appointed Dale Green.

—approved the appointment of Craig Grissom to the Franklin County Department of Human Resources Board.

—presented a resolution to Katernia Cole-Coffey, Franklin County Extension Service Director, honoring and congratulating her for being named the 2025 Alabama County Extension Director of the Year.

The next work session for the Franklin County Commission will be January 12, 2026 and the monthly business meeting will be at 8:30 a.m., on January 20, 2026.



Franklin County Extension Service Director Katernia Cole-Coffey, third from left, receives a framed copy of a resolution from the Franklin County Commission honoring her for being named the 2025 Alabama County Extension Service Director of the Year. From left, Commissioner Tracie Clark, Probate Judge Barry Moore, Cole-Coffey, Commissioners Joseph Baldwin and Grayson Murray and Kristina Rossin with Franklin County Extension.



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'CAREER TECH,' from Page 1

website.

At 9 a.m., after arriving at the facility and being maneuvered through the security gate, the senior RHS students, all taking part in the RHS Career Technical Education (CTE) program, were led to a comfortable conference room, were given a brief safety orientation, introduced to a few members of the CertainTeed team, and were then split up into two groups: one group would tour the manufacturing plant while the other took part in a group challenge before swapping.

Following the safety orientation, CertainTeed Roofing plant manager Frederick Drake addressed the students seated around the conference table. After touting the company's high starting wages and familial atmosphere, and detailing the importance of the manufacturing industry—an industry that added over \$50 billion to Alabama's economy last year—Drake implored the students to be engaged while on site.

"Be curious. Ask questions," he told them.

The Franklin Free Press followed one group of six students throughout the event, starting off with the tour of the plant. Decked out in the required PPE—personal protective equipment—the tour, led by production lead Zach Broadfoot and pulper operator Josh Link (the other group was led by store room coordinator Mark Kresch and process engineer Joshua Williams), began at—well, the beginning.

Starting at what was labeled the Stock Prep area, the group was taken through the control room, watched the glass mat rolling and wrapping processes, and visited the quality lab and the maintenance shop before finishing up at the storage and shipping areas. Along the way, Broadfoot and Link explained each step of the process and fielded questions from the students. Employees in each department did the same, especially in the maintenance department after a few students mentioned their interest in electrical and mechanical engineering.

On-site visits and tours like the one experienced by students Wednesday are extremely valuable, RHS Career and Technical Education Director Dr. AnnaKay Holland told the FFP. Not only are students able to see what the work and process looks like, it confirms that vital, high-paying careers are out there outside going the traditional four-year degree route.

"Hands-on tours to places like CertainTeed, a building materials manufacturer, are incredibly effective at showing students that valuable, well-paying careers in skilled trades and technical fields exist beyond the traditional four-year college path, often leading to immediate employment, less debt, and tangible skills through certifications or apprenticeships," Holland said. "Student feedback reflected that students gained an excitement for trades and were able to see a real-world value in these careers. RHS CTE is trying to make sure that all of our students know that great jobs and careers exist in Franklin County, and we are trying to show them where those careers are located. For some of our students it creates a shift in career perspective. One of them told me, 'I thought college was the only way to earn a good living, but this opens up new ideas for me.'"

Drake, during his introduction to the visiting students, echoed Holland, using his own story as an example.

"I became plant manager here, and I didn't go to college," said Drake, who entered the U.S. military after high school.

"The manufacturing industry needs good people and hard workers. The work isn't always easy, but if you work hard and do things the right way you can provide a great living for yourself and create a great life outside of work that you can spend with family and friends," he added.

The other activity the CertainTeed team had lined up for the students was a challenge testing their problem-solving and process planning skills. Broken up into competing teams by Jessica Montgomery, a member of the human resources department, students had to deconstruct clicker pens, develop a process plan that would most efficiently and effectively reconstruct the pens, and then implement that plan to reconstruct more pens than the other team.

Montgomery, after a provided lunch, also spoke to the students about job opportunities and what qualifications industry employers like Saint-Gobain and CertainTeed are looking for in job candidates.

All together, the event lasted around three hours. And gauging from the reaction of students, it was time well spent fulfilling the stated purpose of Saint-Gobain's SFRC initiative: to "spark curiosity, build awareness and inspire the next generation to pursue fulfilling manufacturing careers..."

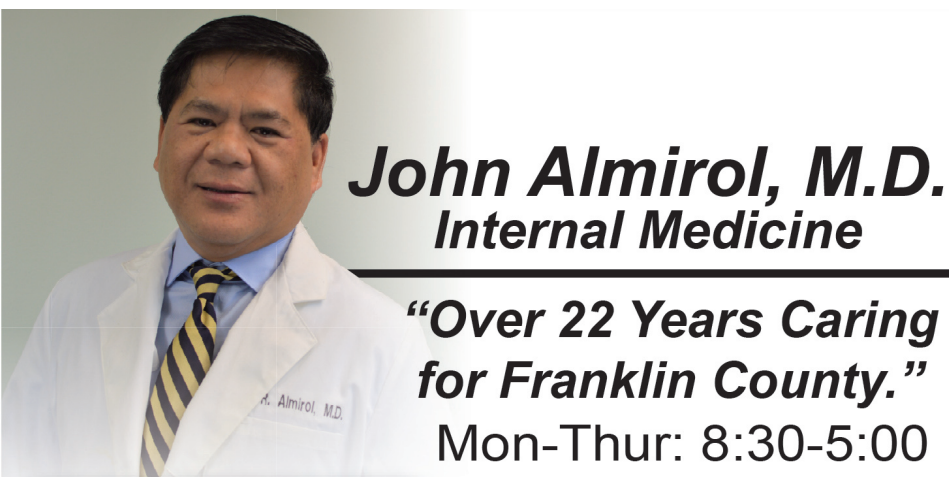
As director of the RHS CTE program, Holland said important work is being done in the classroom, but it's also critical that industry leaders like Saint-Gobain/CertainTeed have programs like SFRC that work hand-in-hand with students and career tech educators.

"I have always said CTE classes are all the things, and RHS CTE has the best teachers in the state. Career and Technical Education classes are a big deal, offering students hands-on training, industry skills, and pathways to high-demand careers in fields like tech, healthcare, trades, business and more, often leading to certifications or college credit right from high school, making them super relevant for today's job market! They're not just 'vocational' anymore, but comprehensive programs connecting academics with real-world jobs, preparing students for college or a great job after graduation," Holland said.

"Industry partnerships, like those with Saint-Gobain/CertainTeed, are extremely crucial for RHS Career Technical Education programs, providing vital real-world relevance, bridging the skills gap, offering hands-on experience like tours and internships, updating curriculum with emerging trends, and creating direct pathways to employment, ultimately boosting student employability and local economies. These connections transform abstract learning into tangible career opportunities, making CTE classes at RHS more engaging and effective," she added. "RHS CTE wants to extend a huge thank you to Mr. Drake and his staff at Saint-Gobain/CertainTeed for providing these opportunities to our students!"

For his part, Drake said he was happy to open up the doors for RHS CTE students—students set to become the future of an industry workforce projected to grow by 8% over the next decade.

"It was a true blessing to host the bright students from Russellville High School, 'Go Tigers!', as part of Saint-Gobain's Sustaining Futures, Raising Communities program," he said. "Our site has been a pillar of this community since 1981, and with God's help we are proud to continue providing good-paying jobs and community support. We aren't just a manufacturing facility; we are a family dedicated to building a strong future right here in Russellville."



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Stutts' leadership role in Senate grows as he announces bid for fourth term

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press



As he enters the final year of his third term representing the people of Alabama's State Senate District Six, somewhere along the way Sen. Larry Stutts realized he actually enjoys public office, so much so that he announced last week plans to run for a fourth term.

First elected to the Alabama Senate in 2014, Stutts has survived some fierce campaign battles against two veteran elected officials, unseating incumbent Sen. Roger Bedford Jr., in 2014, and winning a razor-close result in 2018 over former Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow.

With each victory, Stutts' seniority in the Alabama Senate grew, as did his committee assignments giving Stutts leadership roles among his colleagues.

One big change since Stutts' last election victory in 2022 was his retirement last year from practicing medicine. After 32 years as an OB/Gyn, he decided to sell his practice and retire last fall.

But don't think Stutts suddenly has tons of free time on his hands. Since November 1, 2024, the day his retirement took effect, Stutts has significantly increased his visibility and presence among his constituents. When asked to appear at events around Senate District Six, he's accepted most invitations, unlike when his medical practice required him to decline attending most events.

And he's enjoying that increased presence, seeing it as a blessing and not a burden.

"I have no regrets about my decision to retire. I'll run into former patients and miss seeing them, but I still have people call asking medical questions and that's okay," Stutts said. "I really enjoy now having the time to talk with more people and meet new people across District Six."

In a recent two-week period in November, Stutts attended 10 events, and said he's averaging 3-4 appearances each week.

"Retirement has freed me to have a bigger presence in the community. I'm in a lot better position now to be more involved and more visible across District Six," Stutts said.

Stutts' legislative agenda has always included reshaping and strengthening health care in rural communities, and improving access to health-care through broadband infrastructure growth, which also aids farmers and small businesses across District Six.

Stutts serves as Chairman of the Senate Children and Youth Health Committee, and he's Vice-Chairman of the Senate Healthcare Committee, where he has sponsored and supported legislation aimed at improving medical care and services for Alabama families.

As Chairman, Stutts holds the ability to get his priority bills through committee or prevent one from going through, which makes Senate committee chairman assignments so important.

"Seniority plays a significant role in that—not just in regular committees but also some opportunities for other leadership positions," Stutts said, perhaps hinting toward a leadership role for the entire Alabama Senate body in a fourth term.

Stutts is widely considered one of the most conservative members of the Alabama Senate, both on fiscal issues as well as moral issues.

"I will continue fighting for common-sense solutions that help our families, keep our communities safe, our taxes low and ensure our children have strong schools and better opportunities right here at home," Stutts said of his plans if elected to a fourth term.

"Representing the people of Colbert, Franklin, Lawrence and Limestone Counties in Montgomery has been and remains one of the highest privileges of my life, but I'm running again because there is more to do—from improving access to healthcare and rural broadband to continuing to support our farmers and small businesses," Stutts added.

You can learn more about Stutts' biography and see which issues have shaped his representation in Montgomery by visiting www.larystutts.com.

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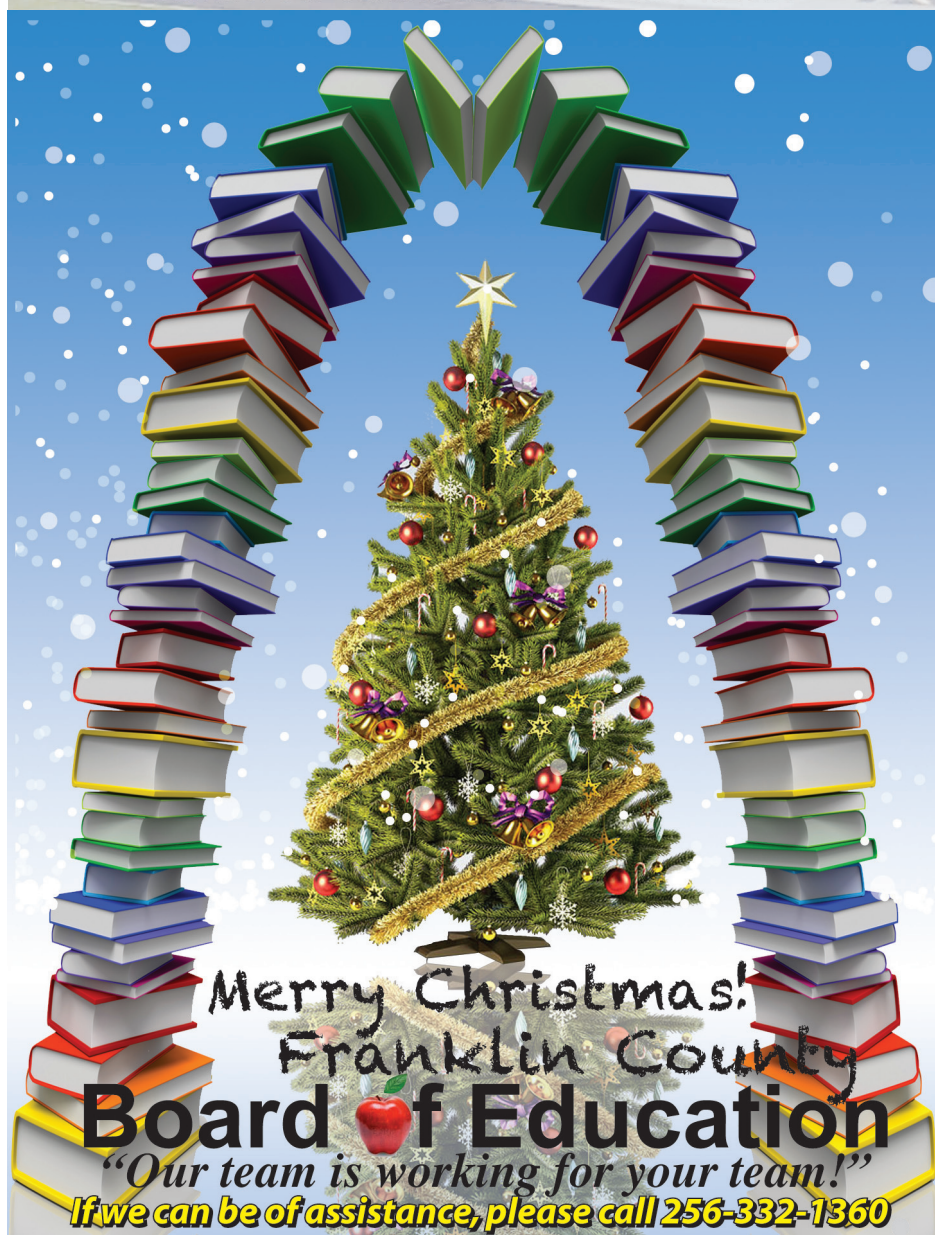


From left: Commissioners Grayson Murray,
 Greg Hovater, Probate Judge Barry Moore,
 Commissioners Joseph Baldwin and Tracie Clark.
 ~ The Franklin County Commission



Russellville City School Board of Education. Front Row, from left: Radford Hester, Kim Clonts,
 Greg Trapp. Back Row, from left: Howard Hillman Jr., Tim Guinn, Ike Rogers.

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Franklin County among leading Alabama counties with high-speed fiber connectivity percentage

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Alabama has made significant progress in the past five years toward getting all households access to high-speed internet, but substantial work remains, particularly in the state's highest-poverty counties.

A new report released by the University of Alabama's Education Policy Center and Center for Business and Economic Partnership in partnership with AL.com, showed Alabama's progress in high-speed internet expansion since 2018.

There are seven counties in the new report that fall under the 'underserved' category and seven more classified as 'unserved.'

Good news for Franklin County—it is not among either classification. It is among the 53 of 67 Alabama counties meeting the definition of 'served.' Of the seven underserved counties, six are in Alabama's Black Belt, the state's highest-poverty area. Four of the seven unserved counties are Black Belt counties.

The statewide fiber network buildout is complete, meaning the infrastructure is complete for high-speed fiber-optic broadband internet to be accessible to all 67 counties.

Where the lag exists is with the local build-outs in several counties. Some have no last-mile access for residents, while others have a limited percentage of residential access.

The statewide average shows 87% of homes having high-speed internet access, but that percentage drops significantly in the underserved counties, the report showed.

The report defines 'underserved' and 'unserved' as counties with less than 50% household access to fiber-optic high speed broadband.

With Franklin County, efforts began 15 years ago with the formation of the Franklin County Broadband Task Force. That task force, created for former Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow, began efforts to find an internet provider willing to build the infrastructure into rural areas as part of 'last-mile' access.

Unfortunately for Franklin County residents, larger providers including AT&T and Spectrum were unwilling to make that investment, choosing instead only to serve densely populated areas.

The Task Force brought public awareness to the county's need for high-speed fiber-optic broadband, but ran into a wall when it came to a funding source to invest in that buildout.

As of October 2025, FreedomFiber has successfully created access to 96% of Franklin County homes, a remarkable achievement made possible through a team effort that included Franklin County federal, state and local elected officials, grant funding secured through the Franklin County Water Service Authority, which was tasked with the official authority to pursue grants for a countywide buildout.

Alabama's Broadband Initiative, created through the support of Gov. Kay Ivey and the Alabama Legislature, provided nearly \$150 million in critical funding for high-speed fiber-optic broadband buildout, as well as some federal grant funding from the United States Department of Agriculture's ReConnect program.

The final financial piece came when the Franklin County Commission committed up to \$5 million for broadband access buildout out of the county's American Rescue Plan grant monies.

There would not be a way for those funds to be spent if not for the vision of former Freedom Fiber CEO Steve Foshee and the Board of Directors of Tombigbee Electric Cooperative to see Franklin County last-mile buildout through to completion.

The fiber-to-home buildout offering speeds up to 1,000 Mbps is substantially complete. The access is now there if rural residents are willing to pay for it.

The benefits of this monumental task include the ability for Franklin County rural residents to work remotely from home, continue their education through online learning and access improved medical care through telehealth. And their children are now able to complete school work remotely.

For a project that seemed a pipe dream just 10 years ago, the 4,200-mile fiber installation was cause for celebration for Freedom Fiber officials at a recent ceremony recognizing the milestone.

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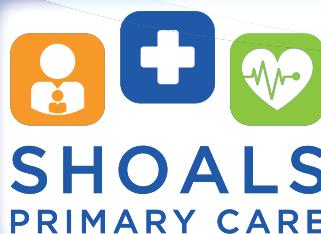
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'Persistence' leads to funeral with full military honors for Russellville veteran

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A 76 year-old Vietnam Veteran was formally laid to rest at Corinth National Cemetery last week after a four-month saga that came about because of the dedication and persistence of a Franklin County Deputy Coroner and a local motorcycle club.

Avery Brewster, who served in the United States Army as a Chief Warrant Officer 2 and helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War, was found deceased in his Russellville apartment on September 4th after Jeff Clark, maintenance worker for Irby Management, was asked by the Russellville Police Department to do a welfare check on Brewster.

Clark, who also serves as a Deputy Coroner for Franklin County, soon realized Brewster had died days earlier. He notified Franklin County Coroner Charles Adcox, who said Clark could go ahead and handle the case since he was on-site already.

Clark began a search for Brewster's relatives to contact them and see what their wishes were about how to handle his arrangements. Almost immediately, Clark realized this would be no easy task.

Clark had Brewster's body transported to Pinkard Funeral Home for storage until next of kin was notified. Unable to locate any family members, Clark found contact information for a friend of Brewster's who lives in Virginia. The friend told Clark Brewster had a brother who lived in Michigan, so Clark reached out to him.

Unfortunately, the 83-year-old brother advanced age and deteriorating health prevented him from traveling to Alabama. Additionally, Clark learned the two men had a unique relationship where they did not communicate in person or over the phone. Instead, they emailed each other once a week.

So Clark again was on his own, although he did learn Brewster was honorably discharged from the United States Army, so he contacted the local Veteran's Administration office for assistance. Had Clark not made that call, Brewster likely would have been cremated and his remains would have sat on a shelf somewhere with no family member to receive it.

The VA officer told Clark Brewster received an honorable discharge from the Army and he was eligible for full military burial in a national cemetery at no cost. Clark spoke with Pinkard Funeral Home officials and they eventually agreed to provide a free funeral and casket once they learned the full story about Brewster.

Clark contacted officials at Corinth National Cemetery and was told they would receive Brewster and bury him there after a full military funeral. They would contact Clark with a date soon for Brewster's funeral.

Before that happened, though, the federal government shutdown began. Cemetery officials told Clark there would be no burials during the government shutdown.

"So we were stuck in limbo. Mr. Brewster's body remained in the coroner's office freezer with no idea when he could be buried," Clark said.

When the shutdown ended in November, all cemetery officials could tell Clark was Brewster's burial date 'was pending.' Again, the waiting game continued.

Finally, the call came notifying Clark the cemetery would receive Brewster's body and his funeral was set for December 11th, nearly four months from the date his body was discovered.

That's when retired Franklin County Deputy Mark Swindle, who still works for the Sheriff's Office part-time, and his Patriot Riders motorcycle club got involved.

Swindle arranged with multiple law enforcement agencies for Brewster's body to be escorted all the way to Corinth. The Franklin County Sheriff's Office escorted the procession to the state line, where deputies from the Alcorn County, Miss., Sheriff's Office took over from there, blocking every intersection with traffic lights throughout the escort.

The Patriot Riders club includes several Veterans among its ranks, and the club provided full military honors for Brewster and an escort with bikes decorated with American and state flags. Brewster's funeral included his receiving full military honors and the requisite 21-gun salute. At the conclusion of the funeral, the American flag that adorned the veteran's casket was presented to Clark, along with shells used in the 21-gun salute.

"I'll hold them until a family member requests them. And if that never happens, I'll hold on to them forever. I'm honored to do this for a man who honorably served his country," Clark said.

The December 11th military funeral came to fruition because of the combined dedication and persistence of Clark and the Patriot Riders, along with assistance from Pinkard Funeral Home and law enforcement agencies along the way. Without them, Brewster's urn would sit on a shelf in perpetuity, something they just would not allow. From day one, Clark was resolved to see the process all the way to a proper end.

"We wanted to see him put to rest with some dignity. I just couldn't see him thrown in a hole and cremated with his remains sitting on a shelf," Clark said. "He served his country and we had an obligation to treat him with respect. So at his funeral, we were all his family, and Avery Brewster story concluded with the respect-filled ending he deserved."



Deputy Coroner Jeff Clark holding the American flag presented to him, along with members of the Patriot Riders. (Courtesy photo)

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Russellville City Council approves purchase, installation of Safe Haven Baby Box at Fire Station One

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved plans to purchase a Safe Haven Baby Box and authorized signing a contract for monitoring services with the manufacturer at its December 15th meeting.

The Russellville Fire Department received a \$25,000 donation from two local citizens who wanted to remain anonymous that will be used for the \$16,500 cost to purchase and install the box at Russellville Fire Station Number One on South Jackson Avenue.

The remaining donation funds will apply to the annual \$600 monitoring costs, explained RFD Captain Jeremy Glenn at Monday's meeting. A local contractor will install the box at no cost, Glenn said.

Safe Haven Baby Boxes offer a secure option for mothers in crisis who are not able to properly care for their newborn. The boxes contain safety features and are installed on the exterior walls of fire stations and hospitals, ensuring a safe, and anonymous, surrender of a baby.

Once a newborn is placed inside the box, the exterior door locks automatically and an interior door allows medical personnel to promptly and securely receive the baby. Boxes do not allow for the donor to retrieve the baby once the door is locked. Babies are under continuous video surveillance and are climate controlled 24 hours a day. The video never records or shows the donor party though.

Upon receipt of a baby, an immediate notice is sent to local fire, police and hospital officials so safe and timely care may be provided.

Alabama law allows for the safe surrender of infants with no criminal liability for the donor parent who uses a baby box.

Russellville Fire Chief Joe Mansell said it was a 'no brainer' to participate in the Safe Haven Baby Box program when the opportunity arose.

"We've seen other cities do this and it works. I want to thank the mayor, city council and (City Attorney) Danny McDowell for the work that's been done on this," Mansell said. "A lot of good can come from this. It's a blessing in Russellville that we believe in guns, family and God and we believe each baby deserves to live.

"They are God's children so we owe it to them to do everything that's right for them," Mansell added.

Other agenda items at the council's December 15th meeting included:

—approving a transfer of the license for Retail Beer and Table Wine (Off-Premise Consumption) requested by R&K Tobacco, Inc., d/b/a Thomas Discount Tobacco and transfer of the license for Retail Beer and Retail Table Wine (Off-Premise Consumption) and Retail Liquor (Off-Premise Consumption) Class II package received from Shree Srinivasa, LLC, 27534 Highway 24 West, the former Yogi's Package Store location.

No input for or against the transfers was given at the public hearing held on each proposed transfer.

—approved a resolution honoring the Cotton Flats Cruisers for their community support and service, including a \$500 donation to the RFD's Helping Santa Toy Drive.

—approved a resolution to "Spend \$20 on December 20th" in Russellville, asking each resident to spend at least \$20 locally on December 20th to help local business.

—authorized abatement of nuisance of a structure at 414 Cotaco St. NE. The structure will be demolished and costs will be filed as a lien against the property.

—approved December 26th and January 2, 2026, as additional paid city holidays for all full-time City of Russellville employees.

The next meeting of the Russellville City Council will be January 5, 2026, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.



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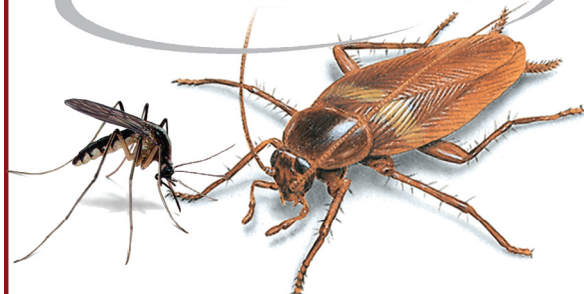
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Phil Campbell football places 13 players on Class 3A All-Region 5 Team

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Phil Campbell High School varsity football team placed 13 players on the 2025 Class 3A All-Region 5 Team, it was announced on Thursday.

The Bobcats had four First Team selections, four named to the Second Team, and had five Honorable Mentions.

Tapped for the All-Region First Team were junior quarterback Hayston Scott, who finished the season with 2,833 yards of total offense and 30 total touchdowns; junior wide receiver Austin Elliott, the team's leading receiver with 925 yards; senior tight end Hagen Raper; and junior defensive back Chandler Benford.

On the Second Team, the Bobcats were represented by senior fullback Logan Cooper; sophomore running back Braxton Downey, who ended the campaign with a team-high 13 rushing touchdowns; senior linebacker Ethan Hallman; and junior offensive lineman Brady Williams.

Rounding out the All-Region selections for Phil Campbell were Honorable Mentions Cody Sneed, a junior linebacker; sophomore offensive linemen Landon Hibner and Jackson Cooper; senior defensive lineman Keaton Baker; and senior defensive back Madden Welch.

See, 'ALL-REGION,' Page 14

Tharptown's Fischer signs with Motlow State softball program

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The latest local Franklin County student-athlete to commit to playing their sport at the next level is Tharptown High School senior Alyssa Fischer, who signed with the Motlow State Community College softball program on Tuesday, December 9 at a ceremony at the high school.

"Alyssa has worked hard and deserves this opportunity," Tharptown softball head coach Jonathan Jones said of Fischer. "This will be my third season with Alyssa and it's been a fun journey. I have enjoyed watching her grow into a great team leader. She has always been a great player and now she appears to have developed a greater ability to lead."

"She loves the game of softball and it's truly a blessing she is on our team," Jones added. "She is a great defensive player, pitcher and a strong hitter. Alyssa has a great knowledge of the game. She will find success throughout her college career."



Back row, from left to right: THS softball head coach Jonathan Jones, Jessica Fischer, Kara Nichols, Karlie Moore, THS principal Dr. Tyler Berryman
Front row, L to R: Wanda Gravitt, Alyssa Fischer, Dave Fischer

See, 'FISCHER,' Page 15

Phil Campbell basketball teams sweep Colbert Heights to open area play

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

It was a good night for the Phil Campbell High School varsity girls' and boys' basketball teams on December 9 as both picked up victories against Colbert Heights High School in their opening area contests of the 2025-26 campaign. The Lady Bobcats earned a 45-36 win over CHHS and the PCHS boys routed the Wildcats 71-53.

The girls' game opened the action at the PCHS gymnasium, and the hosts got off to a scorching hot start: Phil Campbell jumped out to a 16-2 lead by the end of the first quarter before taking a 20-point, 28-8 lead at the halftime break.

"We executed well," Phil Campbell girls' basketball head coach Craig Thomas said of his team's first half performance. "We executed and (Colbert Heights) wasn't putting just a ton of pressure on us—and we actually shot for a high percentage in the first half."

That all changed in the second half as the visitors went on a 18-6 run to start the third period and cut the deficit to eight points heading into the final eight minutes.

Unforced turnovers and allowing Colbert Heights easy, second-chance baskets hurt the Lady Bobcats coming out of the break.

"I think our youth showed there," Thomas said. "We quit covering the pick-and-rolls, we started going under screens instead of sitting on top of them like you're supposed to, and I think they hit a few threes in a row."

"I think we sort of just took (the lead) for granted, and our youth showed up a little bit," he added.

In the end, Phil Campbell was able to hold on to its lead in the fourth quarter thanks to a re-motivated defense, a few fast break layups off steals and a couple of gimmes in transition.

"After we got into some trouble we started to bear down on defense again and play like we

See, 'PHIL CAMPBELL,' Page 16

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'ALL-REGION,' from Page 13

"It takes everyone on the team for guys to get recognition, so I'm proud of our whole team. These guys deserve the recognition, and I'm proud of their leadership, effort and attitude to help us have a good season," said Phil Campbell head coach Jacob Hamilton, who led the Bobcats to a 6-5 record and a playoff appearance this past campaign.

"Our seniors set the standard of what we want Phil Campbell football to be by the way we competed throughout the year. I will miss my seniors but I am proud of the mark they left on this program, and I am excited about our returning underclassman to help build and improve on what we have started here," he added.

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'FISCHER' from Page 13

"I'm proud for both Alyssa and her father, Dave Fischer, who is my assistant head coach. They both have put a lot of time into sharpening her skills as a softball player. It's great to witness them reap the rewards of their labor."

Last season, Fischer was selected to the Franklin Free Press All-Franklin County First Team as a pitcher. She was the Lady Wildcats' top arm in the circle, helping lead Tharptown to a regional tournament appearance. Fischer also batted leadoff, finishing the 2025 campaign with 18 RBIs and a .490 batting average.

Fischer, who has one more season left with the Lady Wildcats, will be joining a Motlow State Bucks team, coached by Janice Morey. The Bucks compiled a 13-30 record in the 2025 season. Motlow State, located in Tullahoma, Tennessee, competes in the Tennessee Community College Athletic Association and in Division I of the National Junior College Athletic Association.



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'PHIL CAMPBELL' from Page 13

were supposed to," Thomas said.

In the fourth quarter, the Lady Bobcats outscored the Lady Wildcats 11-10, enough to give PCHS the 45-36 win.

Downing the Lady Wildcats means a positive area start for the Phil Campbell girls, who hope to return to regional action again this season.

"This is a very important win—that's what I was telling the girls," Thomas said. "We don't want anything to come down to a coin toss. Of course, we have Mars Hill in our area so we want to finish second or third (in the area) and give ourselves a chance (in the area tournament). Tonight was a good start to getting that."

Phil Campbell's Leela Baker was the game's top scorer with 15 points. Baker, who reached the 1,000 career points milestone earlier this season, has been the pivotal, driving force for the Lady Bobcats this year, leading the team in a number of ways.

"Leela is very important to our team. She's one of the best shooters I've ever coached," Thomas told the Franklin Free Press. "She takes care of the ball most of the time, and she's our go-to—there's no doubt. When things get tough she's the one we count on."

"She's a good leader on the floor. She keeps the younger girls' confidence up," he added. "We're playing two eighth graders, a ninth grader and a bunch of tenth graders, so she has to do a lot. I do enough fussing on them, and she does a great job being there to pick up the pieces."

Seven other Lady Bobcats got on the scoresheet alongside Baker. Addie Gilbert had eight points, Georgia Motes and Layla Baker added six points, Emily Walker scored four, and three others scored two points.

After the girls' game, the Phil Campbell boys met Colbert Heights on the hardwood.

The contest was much more competitive in the first half than the previous game as the Bobcats took just a four-point, 34-30 advantage into the halftime break.

However, led by 17 points from junior Austin Elliott and 16 points from Madden Welch—Welch scored 10 of those points in the fourth quarter—the Bobcats ended up running away from the Wildcats before the final buzzer sounded.

Second year Phil Campbell boys' head coach Shannon Benford said his team showed much more fight in the final 16 minutes which allowed them to eventually put the game out of reach.

"The first half we had no intensity whatsoever. We were lackadaisical on defense and not guarding very well," he said. "We switched to man-to-man (defense) in the second half and put a lot more pressure on them, and I think that really affected (Colbert Heights)."

The Bobcats lead by as much as 24 points late in the second half, but at the same time the hosts allowed CHHS a few freebie points off technical fouls. Benford said picking up a first area win was important, but the Bobcats still have areas in which they need to improve.

"It's a good win, but we've got a long way to go," he said. "We gotta keep our heads a little better—keep our cool a little better. And we get a little lackadaisical sometimes, so we still have work to do before we play Sheffield on (December 12)."



The Red Bay High School varsity basketball teams celebrated Senior Night before the girls' and boys' games against Sulligent on Friday, December 12. The RBHS girls' team fell to Sulligent 44-29. The Red Bay boys defeated the Blue Devils 73-48 behind a career-high 31 points from Khalil Luster.



Photos by Caleb Ramey

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Tharptown girls, boys sweep visitors Shoals Christian

*Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press*

The Tharptown High School varsity girls' and boys' basketball teams swept Shoals Christian on December 11 with the Lady Wildcats winning 33-23 and the THS boys extinguishing the Flame 48-27.

Tharptown's girls got the evening started with a 10-point victory to improve their record to 2-6.

Down 11-10 after the opening period of play, the Lady Wildcats allowed just one point in the second quarter to take a 22-12 lead into halftime.

Led by 13 total points from Carly Cason, who also grabbed 10 rebounds to finish with a double-double, Tharptown maintained it's advantage in the second half to walk away the victors.

In addition to her double-double, Cason also added five blocks. Senior Alyssa Fischer added seven points and 15 rebounds for Tharptown, and Allie Gann scored five points to go along with five steals.

In the boys' game, the Wildcats took care of business with a 21-point win to improve to 5-3 on the year.

Leading the way for Tharptown was Zach Riley, who ended the night with a game-high 19 points.

Two other Wildcats also put up double figures: Evin Lawson scored 12 points and Cody McKlusky scored 10.

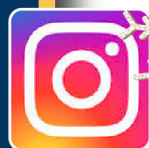


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Oliver balances NWSCC softball and service as a volunteer firefighter

Submitted

When the call comes in, Brianna Oliver trades her softball glove for fire gear without hesitation.

Oliver, a freshman softball pitcher for the Northwest Shoals Community College Patriots, also serves as a volunteer firefighter with the Hatton Volunteer Fire Department. This is a role she does not take lightly and one she has witnessed since she was a little girl.

Service is in her blood. Her mother served 12 years as a volunteer firefighter, and her father dedicated 17 years to the department. Growing up, Oliver watched them drop everything, racing out the door to help neighbors in need.

“I want to continue where my parents left off and help my community,” Oliver said. “There are not many people close to my age serving, and I want to encourage others to serve their community.”

Balancing athletics and emergency service isn’t easy. A typical week for Oliver includes early-morning workouts, classes, afternoon practices, and calls whenever she is available. Oliver has officially been serving as a volunteer firefighter since July of 2025, but she has been on approximately 80 calls.

According to Oliver, the most rewarding part of being a volunteer firefighter is being able to help someone on what might be the worst day of their life. “Knowing that I might be able to save someone’s life, help an elderly person in my community they may have fallen, or even rescue a personal item from burning that is really sentimental, that makes it all worth it.”

Patriots head softball coach Angel Brown says Oliver knows what it means to stand in the line of fire.

“As a pitcher, Bri (Brianna) faces every inning with the same courage and composure that define a firefighter — calm in chaos, quick to decide, and fearless when the pressure is highest,” Brown said. “No matter the situation on the field, she sacrifices her body without hesitation for her team. The traits she’s built on the mound mirror the ones needed as a volunteer firefighter: strength, resilience, and the heart to step forward when others step back.”

Oliver hopes her journey encourages young girls in her community to chase big dreams.

“I want them to know they can do it all,” she said. “You can be an athlete. You can be a firefighter. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”

As she continues her studies and her softball career at Northwest Shoals, Oliver is not sure what her career will look like, but she does plan for it to include being a volunteer firefighter.


“I plan on doing this as long as I can. At the end of the day, I just want to make a difference,” she said.



Brianna Oliver, freshman NWSCC Patriots softball pitcher, poses in her Hatton Volunteer Fire Department turnout gear at Patriot Park. (Courtesy: NWSCC Athletics)

Merry
CHRISTMAS
and
HAPPY NEW
YEAR

Franklin County Probate Judge
**BARRY
MOORE**



MERRY
CHRISTMAS
AND HAPPY NEW YEAR

David & Kim
PALMER
and Family

**Bedford, Rogers, Bowling
& McReynolds, P.C.**

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No representation is made that the quality of the legal services to be performed is greater than the quality of legal services performed by other lawyers



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Rita King
Parent Educator

What's Happening with Your Franklin County Extension Office!

The Franklin County Commission presented Franklin County Extension Service Director Katernia Cole-Coffey with a framed copy of a resolution honoring her for being named the 2025 Alabama County Extension Director of the Year. Below, Cole-Coffey receives the framed copy from Probate Judge Barry Moore. Pictured, from left: Commissioner Tracie Clark, Moore, Cole-Coffey, Commissioners Joseph Baldwin and Grayson Murray and Kristina Rossin with the Franklin County Extension Service.



Holiday Cacti

Thanksgiving
Schlumbergera truncata

Christmas
Schlumbergera x buckleyi

Easter
Schlumbergera gaertneri

The trio of holiday cacti—Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter—are so named because those holidays coincide with their bloom times. They are one of the easiest indoor plants to care for. Learn the differences in each cacti and how to keep them thriving all season long. Learn more here: <https://www.aces.edu/go/5641>.

MERRY CHRISTMAS
and Happy New Year
from the Franklin County Extension